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## TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICES

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### Introduction

Some people with disabilities (those who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing, or speech disabled) may find voice-to-voice telephone communications inaccessible or ineffective. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), all states are required to have certain relay services available.

The federal Fair Housing Act, local fair housing laws, and other disability access laws require housing providers to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services, when such accommodations may be necessary to afford people with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. In some cases, a housing provider will need to communicate with some individuals via a telecommunications relay service.

### There are three types of relay services:

- TTY, Voice Carry-Over (VCO), Hearing Carry-Over (HCO) – one of the parties to a call uses a TTY.
- Speech-to-Speech (STS) – one of the parties to a call has a speech disability.
- Video Relay Service (VRS) – one of the parties to a call uses sign language, communicated by camera. [Note: Due to technical issues, this service is not legally required by the FCC. In Washington state, we have VRS available.]

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### TTY RELAY

#### What is a TTY?

TTY stands for TeleTYpewriter (also known as a TDD, a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf or text telephone). The TTY consists of a keyboard, a text display and a modem. A TTY user types letters that are converted into electrical signals and travel over regular telephone lines to another TTY, where they appear on a text display or a paper print-out. The TTY has millions of users nationwide (approximately 75% are deaf or hard of hearing, and 25% have severe speech disabilities).

## **What Are Telephone Relay Services?**

Telephone relay services are the answer to the following questions:

- How can I make a TTY call if I do not have a TTY?
- How can I speak on the phone with someone who has a speech disability?

Below is information about the Washington Relay Service, used to facilitate communication between standard telephone and TTY users, VCO and HCO services that are essentially a hybrid phone/TTY relay service, and the Speech-to-Speech service, used to facilitate telephone conversations with those who have speech disabilities. Also available are video relay services (VRS), for those who prefer to use sign language.

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### **WASHINGTON RELAY SERVICE**

Washington Relay Service is a telecommunications relay service that provides full telephone accessibility between standard telephone users and individuals who may use TTY, phone/TTY combination equipment, or video-based communication. Specially trained Communication Assistants (CAs) complete all calls and stay on-line to relay messages electronically by typing on a TTY, voicing information to hearing parties, or signing information to sign language users.

Relay services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with no restrictions on the length or number of calls placed. There is no additional cost for the service; calls are billed at regular rates, and long distance rates are charged. This valuable tool gives individuals who have TTYs and those who do not the opportunity to communicate effectively via telephone.

The state of Washington established a relay service before the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law on July 26, 1990. Title IV of the ADA requires all telecommunications common carriers (telephone companies) to provide, or contract to provide, full interstate Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS). Both TTY and Speech-to-Speech relay services are required by law. Currently, Sprint has the contract to provide these services within Washington.

### **How does the Washington Relay Service work?**

TRS enables hearing people using a standard telephone to communicate with people who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing, or speech disabled, and who use a TTY or a specially equipped personal computer, and vice versa.

- A person who is deaf-blind may use either a TTY (often with a larger visual display) or a TeleBraille device (TTY with a refreshable Braille display). Someone who is deaf-blind may need a little more time to read visual or Braille displays, so please be patient.
- A person who is speech-disabled types his/her conversation for the CA to read to the standard telephone user, but can listen to the person being called with Hearing Carry-Over service (HCO).

- An individual who prefers to speak for herself may use Voice Carry-Over service (VCO), speaking directly to the hearing party, but receiving responses via the relay CA on TTY.

These conversations take place in real time. By law, all calls are handled in strict confidence.

## **How Do I Make a Washington TTY Relay Service Call?**

The procedure is similar for all types of relay calls. If you have any questions about procedure or etiquette, feel free to ask the CA. See sections on VCO, HCO, and VRS for additional information unique to those relay calls. The information outlined below is for a Voice-to-TTY relay call.

- Call the Relay Service (711). Tell the CA the number you wish to call and the person to whom you wish to speak.
- Wait briefly while the CA dials the TTY user. After making the connection, the CA will tell the TTY user that this is a relay call.
- As with any telephone call, you and the TTY user take turns. The CA will voice the TTY user's words to you, and will type your words on the TTY to the TTY user.
- As with TTY-to-TTY conversations, it is impolite to interrupt the other person while talking via TTY relay. It is respectful to be brief and to the point, taking breaks to give the other person a chance to respond.
- During the conversation, each time you finish with your turn and wish to hear from the other person, it is helpful to say "go ahead" or "GA" (like saying "over" in radio talk).
- Deaf TTY users have a broad range of English skills and for many, English is their second language. Some may use what seem to be awkward phrases, or "telegraphed" thoughts and ideas without using standard English grammar, syntax, or sentence structure. The CA is trained to make the call as conversational as possible, so the TTY user's words will be voiced to you in standard English order to help ensure clear communication. Take care to be respectful and try to avoid jargon and use language that the caller will be able to understand; "simplified English."
- Be sure to talk directly to your caller, not to the CA. For example, say, "How are you today?" rather than "Ask him how he is today." The CA will relay what you say to the TTY user verbatim.
- At the end of the conversation, you or the TTY user may say "GA to SK" (TTY shorthand for "stop keying" or "I am finished."). If also finished, the other person will say "SK" and you both can hang up. You may also simply close the conversation as you would with any other call, providing an opportunity for the other party to make final comments to be sure both of you are ready to end the call. The CA is trained and will be able to interpret closing remarks; if he/she is uncertain, the CA will ask.

## **What happens when you receive a TTY relay call?**

When you receive a TTY relay call, the Communication Assistant at the relay service will tell you, "The person on the line is using the Washington Relay Service to communicate with you. The caller is typing their conversation, which will be read to you. When you hear the words 'Go Ahead,' it will be your turn to speak. Speak directly to the caller. Everything that is heard will be typed to them. One moment for your call to begin."

Please refer to the above section on "How Do I Make a Washington TTY Relay Service Call?" for additional information and guidance for conducting the call.

## **Final Notes**

A Relay Service call will likely take a bit longer than a standard telephone call. Be sure to set aside sufficient time for your call. Calls with TeleBraille users may take longer than the average Relay Service call. The TeleBraille unit works like a TTY but uses a refreshable Braille display that takes longer to read than a visual TTY text display. Be patient if the person you are calling takes a little longer to respond.

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## **VOICE CARRY-OVER (VCO)**

Some deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals prefer to speak for themselves in telephone conversations, though they cannot hear voice responses from the other party. Voice Carry-Over (VCO) is a service that allows deaf or hard-of-hearing users to speak directly to the hearing party, having their voice "carried over" via the relay service. When the hearing party responds by voice, then the CA types everything said to the TTY or VCO phone user. (A VCO phone is a combination phone/TTY.)

## **HEARING CARRY-OVER (HCO)**

Hearing Carry-Over (HCO) allows individuals with speech disabilities to listen directly to the other party, whose voice is "carried over" rather than being relayed by the CA. The HCO user types the conversation on TTY to the Communication Assistant (CA) who then voices that message to the standard telephone user.

## **SPEECH-TO-SPEECH SERVICE (STS)**

Individuals with disabilities that affect the clarity of their speech may have difficulty being understood in standard telephone conversations, particularly if the callers are not well known to each other. Speech-to-Speech (STS) users may have Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, ALS, muscular dystrophy, or are people who stutter, have had a laryngectomy, or use speech synthesizers. STS provides an intermediary "communication assistant" (CA) to facilitate effective telephone conversations. STS CAs are trained individuals familiar with many different speech patterns and language recognition skills, and re-voice the individual's words exactly and clearly.

## **VIDEO RELAY SERVICES (VRS)**

Sprint Video Relay Service (VRS) enables users who use sign language to communicate via videoconferencing with a remote Video Interpreter, who then relays the signed communication over the phone, in real time, to the hearing party. By using sign language over the full motion video, sign language users are able to fully express themselves in their natural language and convey facial expression and cues to ensure nothing gets lost in the translation. With Video Relay Service, there's no typing for the TTY user, no extended delay, and no "GAs" – just hassle-free, and faster communication that flows as freely as natural conversation.

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### **Washington Relay Service telephone numbers:**

1-800-833-6388 TTY ... or simply use the faster, easier 711  
1-800-833-6384 Voice  
1-800-833-6385 TeleBraille  
1-877-833-6341 Speech-to-Speech  
1-877-833-6399 Spanish TTY  
1-877-833-6398 Spanish Voice  
1-900-646-3323 900 Services

### **For more information on TRS, contact Sprint Relay Customer Service:**

Telephone: 1-800-676-3777 Voice or TTY  
Fax: 1-877-877-3291  
e-mail: [TRSCustServ@mail.sprint.com](mailto:TRSCustServ@mail.sprint.com)

This technical assistance handout includes information from the Washington Relay Service Web site at [www.washingtonrelay.com](http://www.washingtonrelay.com).

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*Contact agency:*

*King County Office of Civil Rights  
400 Yesler Way, Room 260  
Seattle, WA 98104-2683  
206-296-7592, TTY 206-296-7596  
[www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/ho.htm](http://www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/ho.htm)*